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ABSTRACT

Adult education is now seen as an integral part of lifelong education. Adult education has become an instrument of policy that helps forward the goals of social and economic development. In many countries, adult education is being used to promote a greater sense of community and understanding across cultural and ethnic divisions. The tasks of adult education have been defined as development of vocational skills, improvement of the quality of rural life, and activation of civic responsibility. Although policymakers identify women as a target group of adult education, women are not often involved in policy decisions. Throughout the world, a great debate about the value of literacy education and its relationship to social and economic development, especially that of women, is beginning to emerge. Skepticism about policymakers' emphasis on target groups is also becoming evident. Because of the development of women's movements, women are beginning to ask for new types of training, including vocational training for nontraditional jobs and women's studies programs that revalue women's place in human history and enable women to revalue themselves. (Appendixes to this report include the definition of adult education that was adopted by the UNESCO general conference in 1976 and a diagram of a model for overcoming barriers to adult development.) (MN)

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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

ADULT EDUCATION - NEW TRENDS IN EDUCATION AND OCCUPATIONS OF WOMEN

Mount Carmel International Training Centre for Community Development, Haifa, Israel, April/May 1985

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Introductory Lecture

CURRENT WORLD TRENDS IN ADULT EDUCATION

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1. Towards Consensus in Adult Education Theory and Practice - The Unesco Fourth International Conference on Adult Education

Coming here as we do from a diversity of cultures, nationalities and experiences, someone might reasonably ask: is there any commonality in our work? can we talk of world trends in adult education or anything else? In the late 20th century, I believe that we can, partly because of the internationalisation of information (through such interchanges as this symposium will promote) but more particularly because of the existence of both inter-governmental and non-governmental international bodies, which help to set general standards and distil experience.

Several inter-governmental bodies have contributed to the development of shared ideas and practice in adult education, including ILO and FAO, but the key role has been that of Unesco. Among non-governmental organisations, the International Council for Adult Education (founded in 1973) has played a notable part, through its journal Convergence and its close links with regional associations such as the Association for Literacy and Adult Education in Africa and the Asian and South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education.

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Unesco's contribution has included not only experiment, practical programme support and diffusion of information but also the occasional opportunity for politicians, civil servants and professional adult educationists to "take stock" together in conference. Over the years, Unesco has held a sequence of international conferences on adult education - in Elsinore in 1949, in Montreal in 1960, in Tokyo in 1972 and most recently in Paris in March 1985. Each occasion has promoted consensus on some aspect of theory or practice; in Paris there was for the first time a conscious acknowledgement of Unesco's role in mobilising the elements of consensus to establish principles, standards and norms.

The conference was the largest ever held on any theme under Unesco sponsorship - over 120 national delegations were there, as well as 80 observer groups. Attendance on this scale might have been an indication of world-wide interest in adult education at a time of economic uncertainty and technological change. It certainly gave an opportunity to test how much agreement there was internationally on the goals and methods of adult education. As someone present in a non-governmental team, my judgment would be that the conference was a watershed.

For the first time, there was sufficient common ground to make it possible to <u>assume</u> and not have to <u>declaim</u> many basic principles. One key result of the Tokyo gathering had been the adoption by the Unesco General Assembly in 1976 of a Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education, which included a generally acceptable <u>definition</u> of adult education (see Appendix 1) and which has had world-wide currency. Thus in Paris a broad view of adult education was taken for granted and there were no definitional arguments. The report of Commission 2 of the conference makes this point explicit (and in a way which has reference to our own symposium at Mount Carmel Centre):

"Progress since 1972 might be discerned by the extent to which some values and priorities appeared now to be accepted and agreed upon by speakers, rather than any longer to require formal restatement. Thus the priority to be accorded to

women and to various disadvantaged minorities was implied in many contributions rather than attracting sustained comment as if it still needed to be established. The debate was focussed rather on technical means of attaining agreed purposes. Likewise the concept of lifelong learning, and the right to learn, to education as a fundamental human right, was accepted without question ---. More explicit was the acceptance, since the Tokyo Conference, of adult education as an essential tool for both economic and social development."

One effect then of any international meeting, whether a Unesco conference or our own symposium, is to enable us to see precisely what we can take for granted and the Paris conference made it plain, for the first time on such a big stage, that a right to learn is now taken for granted. The conference passed a declaration of the right to learn and its recommendation on Aims and Policies included the consideration that: "--- the right to education is an inalienable right of every person, regardless of race, sex, age, social status and political and religious opinions." Of special interest to us is the consequent conclusion that Member States should: "ensure the active participation of women in adult education programmes and activities" and should "identify and overcome barriers to learning".

All this means that there are identifiable world trends in adult education and that there is increasingly a consensus on what adult education is, on its place within lifelong learning and its role in economic and social development. The Paris conference marked these areas of consensus, added the concept of a right to learn (which is not necessarily the same as a right to be educated) and consciously set about the establishment of standards and prescriptions for all member states to follow.

In the rest of this talk, I will indicate what some of the areas of consensus seem to be, in theory and practice, as they have appeared in the formal Unesco gathering of 1985 and then briefly point out some of the new ideas emerging trans-nationally in less formal arenas.

2. The Concept of Adult Education Today

Adult education, from the Unesco perspective, is now seen as an integral part of lifelong education. The idea of education for the young as a "preparation for life" and with no need for further development could only ever work in periods of relatively slow change. With huge shifts in knowledge, technology and social structures taking place around us in the late 20th century, a more developmental view of human learning has inevitably emerged. Adult education is seen as part of a global pattern including education for the young, whether formal or informal, and enabling all persons to learn anew at all stages of life. There is no longer argument as to whether literacy is some kind of separate activity or whether adult education is or is not mainly about making up for what people missed by not going to school. It is accepted that every person, whether or not they went to school, still needs new knowledge and new skills. The person who did not go to school needs the skill of literacy, but it has to be built on with other skills as well.

Hence in Paris, literacy was accepted as part of a broader pattern of learning. In the background of discussion was the now more commonly accepted notion of Adult Basic Education. This would include literacy, numeracy and all the knowledge and skills needed to take part in society. Adult basic education is seen to provide the skills needed to survive in the modern world but to go beyond that into enabling a person to function effectively in that world.

If one takes adult education as part of lifelong learning there are two further consequences besides the incorporation of literacy work as part of a larger pattern. One is that it should be available to adults of all ages (and this phrase appeared several times in the Paris documents). This is important. Some countries have had legislation offering adult education to certain age-groups only, but now we have gone beyond that. Some psychologists told us in the past that older people were not capable of learning, but more recent psychological research has shown that to be an error. Older persons can go on learning and there is evidence to suggest that women

especially maintain good intellectual functioning into middle age and old age. I stress this here, since our symposium will have to tackle the problem of women who enter new occupations for the first time after the child-bearing years.

The other consequence of a concept of adult education as a part of lifelong learning is that we accept a view of human potential which means that there is a possibility of constant personal development. Educators have to supply that need. An adult does not need 10 literacy certificates on her wall. One is enough and after that she should have opportunities for a variety of further learning. Above all an adult person needs to be helped not just through formal educational provision but through help in the capacity of "learning how to learn". This phrase came out in some of the Paris documentation and it is an important one. People's access to knowledge and ideas should not necessarily be regulated through an educator's perceptions; they should be able to make their own choices and judgments on what they will learn.

3. Adult Education in Policy and Practice

The quotation from Commission 2 of the Unesco conference indicates that adult education has become an instrument of policy in that it is seen as helping to forward the goals of social and economic development. The Director-General of Unesco, M. M'Bow, suggested that one task of adult education was to promote social cohesiveness. In many countries we have a breakdown of a community sense and urbanisation has brought greater individualism. At the same time, there are continuations of old ethnic and cultural conflicts. The curriculum of adult education can be used, it is suggested, to promote a greater community sense and an understanding across cultural and ethnic divisions. For us as women, the question is: can the curriculum of adult education break down the divisions between men and women - divisions in terms of power, access to skills and knowledge, and of participation in social decision-making?

Other social and economic tasks of adult education were defined in Commission 1

of the Unesco Conference. They might be grouped into three areas of activity. One was the strictly vocational - the improvement of skills, the imparting of new skills and the fitting of persons for new types of employment. The second related to rural living - the improvement of the quality of rural life through education in health and nutrition as well as through income generation. The third related to increased participation in public life - the activation of what was called "civic responsibility". All three are obviously of great concern to women, the latter being the hardest to achieve. Policy-makers identify women as a "target group", but very often do not involve them in the policy decisions.

Adult education is seen both as an instrument for solving problems of development and as an instrument for involving individuals in economic social and cultural life (see the reference document for the Paris conference). Because many of the problems of development are related to scientific and technological matters, adult education curriculum-makers need especially to work on the popularisation of basic scientific knowledge and ideas (Commission 1 of the Paris conference). This is a task which we have hardly begun; in this symposium, we must ask ourselves how we can popularise scientific ideas among women.

This has been a very brief look at some policies and tasks as suggested by the Paris meeting. What trends did it indicate in strategies and methods of adult education? I should like to single out two. With regard to strategies, there was a strong case made for what are called "andragogical" approaches. This is to distinguish the adult educational mode of working from "pedagogical" or formal school styles of teaching. While this message is valid for all adult education, perhaps it has particular force in work with women, whose life-styles make them resistant to over-structured activity.

With regard to methods, new communication technologies have encouraged adult educators to look at mass media as means of disseminating new ideas and knowledge. There were several discussions on this at Paris and a number of countries have developed innovatory uses of the media - public television viewing centres etc.

At the same time, economic constraints have to be borne in mind and in the midst of mass poverty, the simpler media are the only practicable ones. For this reason, literacy is tied in with the development of rural newspapers. From the point of view of this symposium we should remember that modern media can transcend the barrier of illiteracy and the transistor radio is a cheap means of offering all sorts of learning opportunities.

I have focussed on some aspects only of the international consensus evident in Paris, since these are the ones most relevant to this symposium. There was also emphasis on formal legislation, on the relation of education to work and on the idea of paid educational leave.

4. Some Other Perspectives

A formal and large-scale international conference has limitations, but I have used the Paris conference to show what general world opinion on adult education seems to be. As I have said, such conferences do provide an opportunity to affirm what is generally accepted. Additionally they provide an opportunity for commitment and once these commitments have been made, those of us who are concerned can follow these up and ensure that our governments really act on those commitments - that, as we say, they "put their money where their mouth is". The right to learn is now a formal international commitment and we should translate that right into practice.

New ideas, however, do not come out of formal large-scale meetings. They arise from all kinds of informal interchange, in bodies such as the ICAE, through journals, papers and broadsheets, through discussion in symposia such as this and through the practical achievements of small groups of adult learners throughout the world.

Before I conclude, therefore, I should like to indicate some of the currents of thought which are beginning to emerge.

First, as a result of the trends of thought which place literacy within adult education and partly as a result of experience, there is at present a great debate about literacy going on. The German Adult Education Association is publishing some of the arguments in its periodical "Adult Education and Development". Doubts are expressed about the value of literacy both within a person's learning programme and within a person's daily life. As all the people involved in the argument are literate themselves, it has to be assumed that they do not entirely deny the usefulness of literacy, but they remind us that there are ways of acquiring wisdom without books, that literacy education and the whole of adult education may be used to bring a population to heel and not necessarily to help them to control their world, and also that literacy education and the whole of adult education is only one weapon in any strategy of social and economic development. As the Indian woman sociologist, Kamla Bhasin strongly puts it (in "Adult Education and Development" No.24): "Those who are saying eradicate illiteracy, are they also saying eradicate hunger, poverty, exploitation? What is their strategy for that? The strategy of eradication of illiteracy has to be part of and related to the strategy of removal of inequalities and exploitation?".

Secondly, some of us are becoming sceptical of the policy-makers' emphasis on "target groups". The danger in approaching adult education in this way is that it implies some passivity among the members of those groups. The rhetoric about "participation", which is now common in international gatherings, whether formal or informal, usually applies to participation at the learning stage and not at the policy stage. It may be argued that one of the objects of adult education is to enable people to move on from participation in learning to participation in decision-making, but persons classified as members of disadvantaged target groups are likely always to be seen as objects rather than subjects. (Incidentally, women form the majority in most countries' populations. How can they be a target-group for a minority? Rather the rest of society might be seen as <u>their</u> target!) Many of us now find it helpful to look at barriers to learning, faced/

faced to a greater or lesser extent by learners, rather than talking about disadvantaged groups as if the disadvantage was somehow their attribute or characteristic and thus somehow their fault.

In Scotland, for example, the Scottish Adult Basic Education Unit has adopted in its policy guidelines a model showing the types of barriers which adult learners face and relating it to the kind of learning which can take place as these barriers are broken down - in fact the kind of learning which is essential to overcome the barriers and become a full member of a democratic society (see Appendix 2).

Thirdly, the development of women's movements of varying kinds in different parts of the world has inevitably had an impact on the nature and practice of adult education. Our whole work in this symposium will be concerned with this and I do not want to preempt discussion. But I should like us to remind ourselves at the outset that women often have a stronger interest than men in "new start" or "second chance" education and in many countries there is an emphasis on such programmes. Further, women are beginning to ask for vocational education for non-traditional jobs; one problem is to break down the barrier of society's attitudes to enable women to become operators of every kind of technology from the simplest to the most complex, while another is to ensure that women are not just trained to take over from men as a cheaper labour force.

We are here too to discuss "the advancement of women towards achievement of positions of responsibility". One new trend in adult education has been the addition to its curriculum of assertiveness training. This is not a very elegant name for the subject area, but it describes training in overcoming such barriers as shyness and society's expectations that women will be submissive to decisions made by men. The curriculum also now includes "women's studies" - an attempt to revalue women's place in human history, to enable women learners to revalue themselves. Some of us would argue that these items are as important in women's education as any of the other possible curricula.

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In conclusion, I have tried to indicate some of the dominant themes in adult education in international currency in 1985 and I hope that they will provide us all with some starting-points (and arguing-points) in the coming week. I hope too, very sincerely, that we as a miniature female United Nations may have a harmonious and creative week and may ourselves add new dimensions to the ideas and practices I have mentioned. May we create our own trend towards wider opportunities for women and thus add to "the multitude of the wise and the welfare of the world".

APPENDIX 1. DEFINITION OF ADULT EDUCATION

From the Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education passed by the Unesco General Conference, 1976

-- The term "adult education" denotes the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the two fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development;

adult education, however, must not be considered as an entity in itself: it is a sub-division and an integral part of a global scheme for lifelong education and learning;

the term "lifelong education and learning" for its part, denotes an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing education system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the education system;

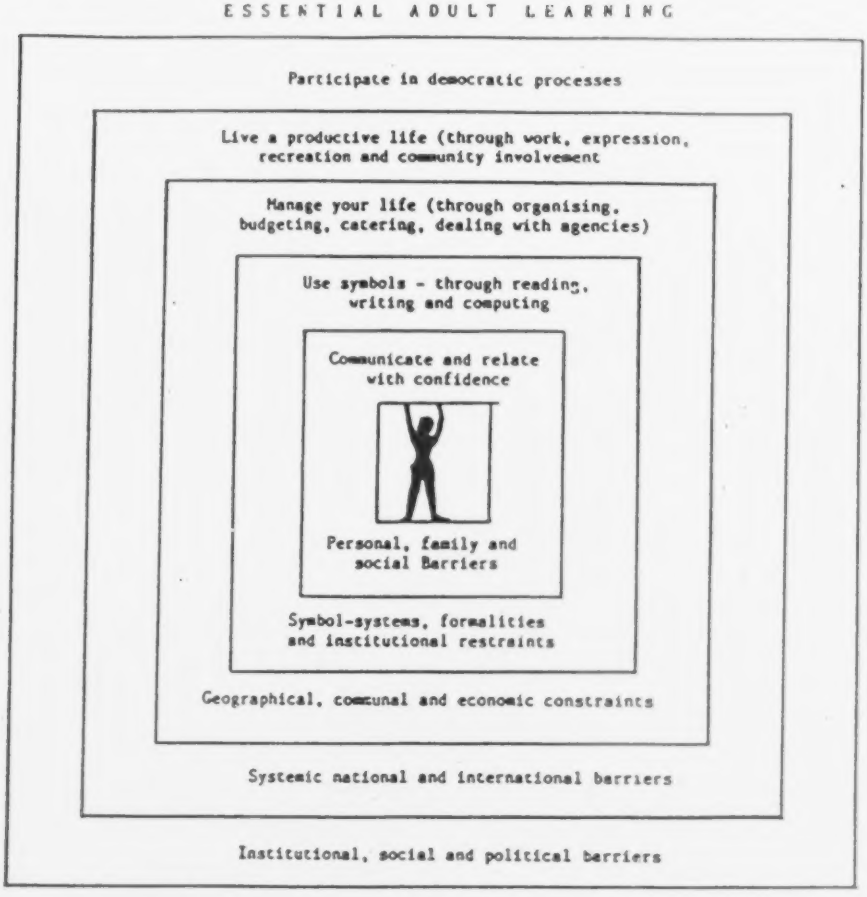
in such a scheme men and women are the agents of their own education, through continual interaction between their thoughts and actions;

education and learning, far from being limited to the period of attendance at school, should extend throughout life, include all skills and branches of knowledge, use all possible means and give the opportunity to all people for full development of the personality;

the educational and learning processes in which children, young people and adults of all ages are involved in the course of their lives, in whatever form should be considered as a whole.

APPENDIX 2/

APPENDIX 2. OVERCOMING BARRIERS


ESSENTIAL ADULT LEARNING
Participate in democratic processes
Live a productive life (through work, expression, recreation and community involvement
Manage your life (through organising, budgeting, catering, dealing with agencies)
Use symbols - through reading, writing and computing
Communicate and relate with confidence
Personal, family and social Barriers
Symbol-systems, formalities and institutional restraints
Geographical, communal and economic constraints
Systemic national and international barriers
Institutional, social and political barriers
OR
BARRIERS TO ADULT DEVELOPMENT
?

Source: Scottish Adult Basic Education Unit Policy Document 1984

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